



DAVID T. ROBERTS

Jim Murphy as the defender of rattlesnakes in a 1989 Dallas Zoo conservation day skit.

PROFILE

Been There, Done That: A Profile of James B. Murphy

David T. Roberts

Dallas Zoo

James B. Murphy was born in Oak Park, Illinois. During his youth, he developed an interest in reptiles and amphibians. Throughout high school, he associated with herpetologists both at zoos and museums in Chicago. His parents, who had never been exposed to these creatures, had, as Jim puts it, “a considerable period of adjustment” while he filled his bedroom with his collection of reptiles and amphibians.

After graduating from high school, Jim decided to major in philosophy at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio with the intention of becoming a college professor in that discipline. According to Jim, he later came to his senses and embarked on a zoo career. Since that time, Jim has not only become one of the most respected curators in the zoological park field, but also in the academic communities of herpetology and conservation.

Jim’s first zoo position was as a keeper in the herpetology department at the Atlanta Zoo. He acquired this position shortly after graduating with his B.S. in Philosophy in 1965. From there, Jim moved west and accepted a keeper position in the newly formed herpetology department at the Dallas Zoo, which had just constructed a bird and reptile building. Later that year, Jim was promoted to supervisor of the department. From this point, Murphy started to become professionally entrenched in the herpetological community. He became program chair for the International Herpetological Society (IHS) that same year and put together a group of speakers and developed a symposium. Since then, Jim has chaired the IHS program two other times. In 1998, he developed a symposium on the differences between captive and wild snakes. Today, Jim is an Honorary Advisor of the IHS.



Jim Murphy and Jack Joy in the field.



DAVID T. ROBERTS

Jim and his wife Judith near their home in Washington, D.C. in 1995.

Murphy’s career led to many professional affiliations, including the Herpetologists’ League (HL), Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR), British Herpetological Society, American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH), Texas Herpetological Society, and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA). He has served those organizations in a variety of positions, including president, chairperson, editor, member of the board of directors, advisor, and professional fellow. Jim also has been a member of numerous foreign and regional societies.

During his career at the Dallas Zoo, Jim worked with myriad people from many different disciplines. He invited experts from other zoos, universities, and conservation organizations from around the world to visit the Dallas Zoo’s collection. He would lead these individuals through the collection, introducing his staff and allowing them to discuss their interests and expertise with the visitors. These introductions were Jim’s way



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Jim in his office at the Dallas Zoo Herpetarium in 1990.

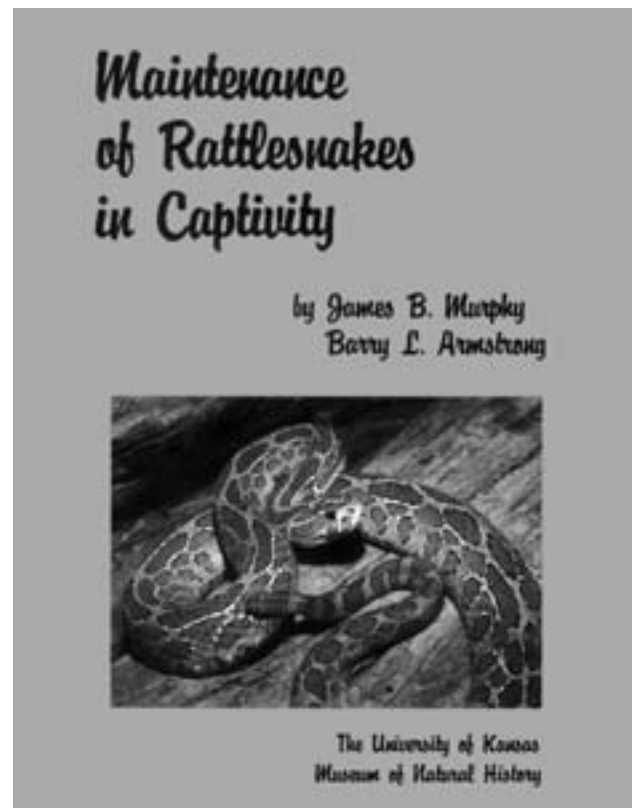
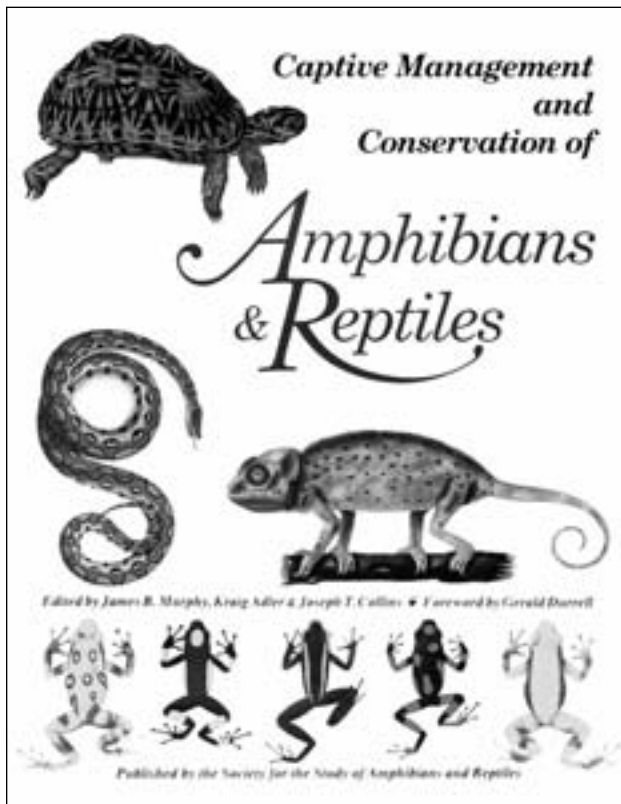
of encouraging collaborative relationships with his staff and other organizations.

Murphy has a wonderful philosophy for managing people. He encourages his staff's interests, guides their learning, helps forge relationships with individuals who share similar interests, and allows his employees to "run with the ball." In other words, he provides his staff with the necessary tools they need to spark their own interests and reach goals they set for themselves.

I came to know Murphy through my love of reptiles and amphibians. As a youngster in the late 60s, I too had a strong interest in capturing and keeping native reptiles and amphibians — a common thread among herpetologists. I had a particularly strong interest in rattlesnakes, and was given a copy of *Maintenance of Rattlesnakes in Captivity*, by J.B. Murphy and B.L. Armstrong. That summer of 1979 was the first time I had ever heard of Jim Murphy. The publication was full of information about more species of rattlesnakes than I knew existed. It was also the first publication to spark my interest in learning the formal taxonomic names of animals. The little book was full of them, and of references to other publications revolving around every aspect of captive rattlesnake husbandry. That book changed my life. I knew then that having a career working with reptiles and amphibians was possible.

In 1982, I literally packed up everything I owned and moved to the Dallas area from upstate New York in an attempt to garner a position at the Dallas Zoo. In April 1986, I was hired as a keeper for the Dallas herpetology department. That was more than 20 years ago, and today I still am deeply involved in herpetological conservation and research.

Under Jim's guidance, I was privileged to work with one of the most dynamic groups of herpers for more than 15 years. During Jim's leadership as curator of the department, we had the opportunity to work with some of the top researchers in our field, including such academic experts as Carl Gans, Hobart Smith, Joe Collins, Jonathan Campbell, and Harry Greene, as well as peers from other zoos, such as Joe Laszlo, Bill Lamar, Rick Hudson, Dave Barker, Bern Tryon, and Charlie Radcliffe, just to name a few. The list is too extensive to account for every



Books like these, co-authored or co-edited by Murphy, served as valuable resources at a time when captive maintenance was considerably less sophisticated than it has since become. By sparking interest and providing valuable references, both books effectively promoted the possibility that careers in herpetological conservation and research were realistic goals of young enthusiasts.



ROBERT CABELLO

1987 Edward H. Bean Award Certificate for Captive Reproduction of Bushmasters (front left: Donal Boyer; front right: Ardell Mitchell; back, left to right: David Roberts, Clay Garrett, Steve Hammack, and Jim Murphy).

influential person who came to discuss ideas, philosophies, and techniques to tease out aspects of the biology, reproduction, and behavior of reptiles and amphibians. Many of these people were close friends of Murphy's, and most took the opportunity to put Jim on the spot with the kinds of embarrassing stories to which those of us in herpetology invariably are burdened. Jim has a wonderful sense of humor and would laugh aloud during these memory-jogging sessions.

Through his career, Jim has served as a reviewer for many scientific journals including *Copeia*, *Herpetologica*, *Transactions of Kansas Academy of Sciences*, *Journal of Herpetology*, *Southwestern Naturalist*, *Texas Journal of Science*, *Science*, *Herpetological Review*, *Hormones and Behavior*, *Acta Zoologica et Pathologica Antverpiensia*, and *Zoo Biology*. Murphy also served as editor for his department. He would jokingly get out a large red marker whenever one of us would hand him our latest manuscript for his perusal. During his tenure, the department produced more than 50 publications exclusive of Murphy, with his own numbering more than 110, including articles, book chapters, and books. The department also received two Edward H. Bean Awards for reproduction (in Bismarck Ringed Pythons and Bushmasters), four significant achievement awards for reproduction (in Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes, Tancitaran Rattlesnakes, Coahuilan Box Turtles, and rattlesnake reproduction programs), 21 First Captive Breeding awards, and a Silver and Gold Propagator's Certificate (for the American Milksnake) from the AZA. Jim also was instrumental in coordinating the Dallas Zoo's receipt of a National Science Foundation grant totaling more than half a million dollars to investigate improved visitor education techniques concerning amphibians and reptiles in a zoological garden.

Murphy's accomplishments in herpetology were acknowledged by the University of Colorado-Boulder when they honored him with an Honorary Doctor of Science Degree in 1989. This was a great moment in Jim's life, and much of the recognition for this honor was organized by Murphy's long-time colleagues David Chiszar and Hobart Smith.

After more than 30 years at the Dallas Zoo, Jim retired from his position as curator and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1994. He is currently a Smithsonian Research Associate in the Department of Herpetology at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, and he stays involved with many organizations, including the IUCN/SSC Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force and the IUCN/SSC Captive Breeding Specialist Group, and is the Section Editor of the "Zoo View" column in *Herpetological Review*. His research interests are now centered on developing quantitative methods for assessing the competence of animals raised in captivity, zoo history, the behavior of pitvipers and other reptiles, and the evolution of herpetological illustrations.



WILLIAM B. LOVE



RICK HUDSON



SUZANNE L. COLLINS, CHAH

Under Murphy's guidance, the herpetology department at the Dallas Zoo received Edward H. Bean Awards for reproduction in Bismarck Ringed Pythons (*Bothrochilus boa*; top) and Bushmasters (*Lachesis muta*; middle) and significant achievement awards for reproduction in Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus adamanteus*; bottom), among others.